

Message Text

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ORIGIN SAB-02

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: NOON PRESS BRIEFING

1. THE FOLLOWING WERE PREPARED FOR THE NOON PRESS BRIEFING,
THURSDAY, MARCH 24.ON AN IF ASKED BASIS.

QUESTION. A STORY OUT OF MAR DEL PLATA, ARGENTINA, SAYS
THAT THE U.S. DELEGATION TO AN INTERNATIONAL WATER CON-
FERENCE BROKE WITH TRADITION BY AGREEING TO A RESOLUTION
CALLING ON THE U.S. TO GIVE THE PANAMA CANAL BACK TO PANAMA.
IS THIS A CHANGE IN OUR POSITION OR DOES IT REPRESENT ANY
KIND OF CHANGE IN OUR POLICY ON THE CANAL? ANSWER. NO.
THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE GONE ALONG WITH A
RESOLUTION CONTAINING LANGUAGE ON THE CANAL IN AN INTER-
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION, ALTHOUGH IT CONTINUES TO BE OUR
POSITION THAT THIS IS A BILATERAL MATTER, WHICH IS BEING
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WORKED OUT BILATERALLY, AND NOT REALLY APPROPRIATE FOR
DISCUSSION IN AN INTERNATIONAL MEETING. HOWEVER, SINCE
THE RESOLUTION IN QUESTION REFLECTS THE PRINCIPLES OF THE
1974 AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA (THE
"TACK-KISSINGER AGREEMENT") WE HAD NO OBJECTION TO IT.

QUESTION. WHERE ELSE HAVE WE GONE ALONG WITH RESOLUTIONS

ON THE CANAL IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS? ANSWER. FOR ONE,

IN THE ECLA (ECONOMIC COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA) MEETING
IN SEPTEMBER, 1976, WHICH WAS A PREPARATORY MEETING FOR
THIS ONE IN MAR DEL PLATA. THERE ALSO WAS ONE IN THE
U.N. IN DECEMBER 1976.

QUESTION. ON THAT STORY (WASHINGTON POST, 3/24 - DON
OBERDORFER) REGARDING PANAMA'S HAVING HIRED A PUBLIC
RELATIONS FIRM TO HELP THEM SELL A NEW CANAL TREATY HERE,
ISN'T THAT A BIT UNUSUAL? DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS?
ANSWER. NO. WE DON'T KNOW THAT THE STORY IS CORRECT, BUT
THERE WOULD BE NOTHING UNUSUAL ABOUT IT. FOREIGN GOVERN-
MENTS DO THAT ALL THE TIME.

QUESTION. IS THE FIRM THAT PANAMA HIRED REGISTERED UNDER
THE FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT? ANSWER. I DON'T
KNOW. YOU'D HAVE TO ASK THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE.

QUESTION. WE GIVE A LOT OF FOREIGN AID TO PANAMA.
AREN'T THEY JUST -- IN EFFECT -- SPENDING SOME OF OUR OWN
MONEY TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION HERE? ANSWER. OUR AID
FUNDS IN PANAMA AND ELSEWHERE ARE USED FOR SPECIFIC
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ARE NOT USED TO UNDERWRITE PUBLIC
AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES IN THE U.S. HOWEVER, WE HAVE NEVER
TAKEN THE POSITION -- AND IT WOULD BE A RIDICULOUS
POSITION TO TAKE -- THAT BECAUSE WE PUT DEVELOPMENT
ASSISTANCE OR FOREIGN AID INTO A COUNTRY THAT GIVES US A
RIGHT TO TELL THEM HOW TO SPEND THEIR OWN REVENUES. IT
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SEEMS TO ME THAT WOULD BE THE IMPLICATION OF THE QUESTION.

2. NO QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AT THE NOON BRIEFING.

VANCE

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